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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRAGUE 000516

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TAGS: [EZ](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: MISSILE DEFENSE: USG ENGAGEMENT DURING CZECH
RATIFICATION

REF: A. 07 PRAGUE 999

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 471

[1](#)C. PRAGUE 407

Classified By: CDA MARY THOMPSON-JONES FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. See action request in Paragraph 7.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Despite the delay in concluding the SOFA, we still expect that the Topolanek government will send the package of missile defense (MD) agreements to the parliament for ratification before the end of 2008. Success in the Czech Senate is likely, but in the Lower Chamber it is not yet assured. In the run-up to the ratification vote, USG engagement efforts should focus on the parliament, but we should also continue our outreach to the Brdy region and the public. With regard to the parliament, quiet diplomacy interspersed with some well planned visits of high-level USG officials has been the key to our success so far, and we are therefore planning to continue in this direction. Over the past year, we have opened new channels of communication to the Czech parliament, and this engagement has been received extremely positively. The Embassy or the USG is almost never criticized, and the information we provide is always welcome. We have managed to build a solid foundation of credibility with the parliament -- but also with the Brdy communities and the public -- and this credibility will serve us well in the coming months.

[1](#)3. (C) Our outreach should continue to focus on the five areas we outlined last year (ref A). First, the strong NATO statement on MD at the Bucharest NATO Summit has been key in dispelling Czech concerns on this score. However, many parliamentarians, especially in the Green Party and the opposition CSSD, believe that the Bucharest Summit statement did not go far enough. Therefore, we must continue to emphasize the progress within NATO and the plans for integration of the MD systems. Second, MD opponents frequently question the reality of the ballistic missile threat. Iran's recent test launches have had an impact here, but the more concrete information we can provide on Iran's programs the better. Third, the Czechs are paying attention to U.S. politics more closely than ever before. We must work to respond to their questions about Congressional and Democratic support for MD and the European site. Fourth, scientific or R&D cooperation is a key priority for PM Topolanek and one of his chief arguments for selecting a different negotiating strategy from Poland. Again, more concrete information on the possibilities of this cooperation will advance our efforts with the parliament and the public. Finally, the Czechs are looking for visible signs that we value the Czech Republic as a partner. The upcoming launch of the U.S.-Czech Strategic Dialogue, as well as the approaching Czech entry into VWP, will be crucial. We should look for other concrete ways to demonstrate to the Czechs that our partnership is about more than just MD. END SUMMARY

AND COMMENT.

RATIFICATION TIMING

14. (C) The usual July-August vacation lull in Prague has delayed the SOFA negotiations and will likely mean that the ratification timetable initially envisioned by the Czechs will also slip. DPM Alexandr Vondra has told us repeatedly that the government would like to send at the end of August the package of MD agreements to the parliament for ratification. However, with all key members of the Topolaneck government on vacation until the middle of August, it is unlikely the Czechs will provide us with a response to the latest SOFA proposal (ref B) before then. Based on the rules that will govern the ratification (ref C), even if the target date for submission to the parliament slips into late September or early October, a ratification vote by the end of the year would still be possible.

15. (C) There are two issues worth noting, that could impact on MD ratification. Both concern the Greens, the smallest party of the Topolaneck coalition government. DPM Martin Bursik has called an extraordinary congress of the Green Party for early September, with the aim of regaining control over his party. Although he is expected to prevail, the Czech Greens have had several leadership "coups" in their brief history. A Bursik loss could throw into disarray not just MD ratification, but many other priority projects of the Topolaneck government, if not the coalition itself. Another matter, which may in part explain the current delay in the

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SOFA negotiations, has been the Greens' insistence on the ratification vote taking place after the U.S. elections. Minister of Education Liska has publicly called for a delay in the ratification, and DPM Bursik has also adopted this stance in an effort not to overly antagonize his party's base. Most recently, DPM Bursik reiterated this condition in a July 26 interview in the Czech daily Pravo.

FOCUS ON THE PARLIAMENT

16. (C) In preparation for the eventual ratification vote, we have made the past year one of intense, unprecedented engagement with members of the Czech parliament and Senate. We have organized dozens of meetings, briefings, and other events, frequently using visits of high-level USG officials as opportunities to bring parliamentarians together so that they would have a chance to discuss MD and ask questions. The parliamentarians' reception with Secretary Rice, following the July 8 signing of the BMD agreement, was the highlight of the last 12 months of our parliamentary engagement. We have also sent several groups of Czech members of parliament on MD-focused trips, including to Kwajalein and the United States. DPM Vondra told Ambassador Graber during their July 3 meeting that the Embassy's parliamentary strategy has been highly successful and encouraged us to continue in these efforts. We have heard similar comments from other members of the government and parliament, including the opposition. All have emphasized the importance of our efforts to provide the MPs and Senators with clear and focused information. Indeed, the opposition has frequently complained publicly and to us privately that the Topolaneck government has not communicated with the opposition on the topic of MD. We, in turn, have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure that members of the opposition CSSD have been present in group briefings and meetings. (Note: We have discussed the opposition's complaints with DPM Vondra, who told us that the government does communicate with those members of the opposition who are willing to listen and work with the coalition government. End Note.)

17. (C) In planning the parliamentary outreach events for this fall, we will therefore continue this successful approach. We have also taken our cue from DPM Vondra, who has told us that the government is planning a series of fall "seminars" for members of the Czech parliament to explain better the MD system, agreements, etc. We will therefore work closely with the Czechs to assist with this effort, which we view as a positive change from the government's less than communicative stance that the opposition has criticized.

We will be looking for additional high-level visits to provide targeted briefings for the parliamentarians. For example, we would like to request fall visits by Under Secretary Rood (to discuss in greater detail the contents of the BMD agreement, possibly in joint sessions with DFM Pojar), Ambassador Volker (to emphasize the NATO aspects of MD, possibly in conjunction with Czech Ambassador to NATO Fule), and Under Secretary Burns (to discuss Iran, which has been the Czech government's key argument for their participation in the MD project). We also anticipate working with Washington on other visits, again focusing on those that can address specific issues or concerns of the Czech parliament.

18. (C) While the several trips that the Embassy's Public Affairs Section and MDA have organized for Czech parliamentarians have been successful, we may face more limited opportunities this fall for two reasons. First and foremost, the Czech political and parliamentary calendar is packed, so timing a trip for a group of parliamentarians will be difficult. Second, we may have problems pulling together a balanced group of parliamentarians, i.e., a group that would include CSSD MPs. Finding interested parliamentarians from the coalition parties would be relatively simple. However, members of the opposition CSSD have been hesitant in the past to commit. Those CSSD MPs who oppose MD do not wish to be associated with project in any way. Those who might support it have told us that they are concerned that they would be accused of having been "bribed" by the Americans. We therefore plan to approach the leadership of the four parties, including CSSD, and offer to discuss with them additional fact-finding trips, but we will leave it up to the parties to sort out whether they wish to use this opportunity.

19. (C) In our past meetings with Czech parliamentarians, we have found that many have only a rudimentary knowledge of the

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MD system, the agreements, and other pertinent issues. Indeed, for many the local media are their primary sources of information. We have therefore requested assistance of MDA and the State Department in producing a series of factsheets that could be used with the parliamentarians, press, and public to provide basic facts about the key issues related to MD.

ENGAGING BRDY IS IN OUR LONG-TERM INTEREST

110. (C) The group of mayors who represent the communities in the Brdy region have been another focus of our outreach strategy, and they should remain so. If, as we expect, the MD agreements are ratified and the USG moves forward with construction, the mayors' support will be critical. Although most of the mayors are still opposed to the MD radar station, we have found over the past year that despite their opposition, they have become increasingly accepting of (or resigned to) the prospect of the MD radar base being constructed in Brdy. Ambassador Graber has traveled to Brdy frequently, sometimes bringing visiting USG officials with him. Most recently, MDA's General Obering and Ambassador Graber met with a group of local leaders on July 10 for a discussion that included Deputy Finance Minister Ivan Fuksa, who heads the government's Brdy Commission charged with disbursing assistance funding to the region.

¶11. (C) During this and other past discussions, the mayors have focused on practical matters related to the construction and operation of the MD radar. General Obering's offer to the mayors to help organize a dialogue with other mayors was especially welcome. To make this dialogue a reality, we are pursuing two ideas: 1) in collaboration with DOD and EUCOM, the Embassy is planning to fund a visit for a group of mayors to two U.S. bases in Germany; besides meeting with their German counterparts, the Brdy mayors would also appreciate briefings on environmental control, impact on local communities, etc.; and 2) MDA and the Embassy are exploring a possible visit of a U.S. mayor (or mayors) from a community near an MD facility; we are currently considering inviting the mayors of Lompoc (near Vandenberg AFB) and/or Delta Junction (near Ft. Greely), both of whom have met with Czech officials before and have left a very positive impression. Embassy Public Affairs would organize these visits using additional PD funds received from State at the end of the fiscal year. With these visits and other activities, we want to continue reinforcing the message that the U.S. military facilities are good neighbors, they can have a positive impact on the local communities, and they take every possible precaution to ensure that environment and health are not negatively affected.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

¶12. (C) MD opponents have cited the public opposition against the system as a key reason for their efforts. While many polls have shown that over 60 percent of the public is opposed to the MD radar stationing in the Czech Republic, this number is somewhat misleading. For example, the most recent STEM poll released in mid-July showed that more than half of the respondents consider Iran a threat and over 70 percent want Europe to be protected from ballistic missiles. These numbers indicate that our public diplomacy efforts should build on these sentiments. However, as the failed Czech government's pro-MD campaign has shown, the Czech public does not take kindly to big media blitzes, which tend to remind many Czechs of the previous regime and its propaganda pushes. We must also be mindful not to get ahead of the Czech government, which has taken a more low-key approach following the failed public campaign led by Tomas Klvana. We are therefore planning interviews with visiting USG officials, as well as possible MD-related visits for Czech media being organized by Embassy Public Affairs. We will also discuss with the Czech government other ways we can be helpful, but ultimately, we must be mindful of the fact that the 60-plus percent number is unlikely to change before -- or after -- the ratification vote, given the two deeply rooted factors behind it: the Czech historical experience and NIMBY ("not in my backyard").
Thompson-Jones